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C O N F I D E N T I A L VILNIUS 001119

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [LH](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTER TALKS ABOUT AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ
DEPLOYMENTS

REF: A. VILNIUS 1110 B. VILNIUS 1032

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Rebecca Dunham for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Lithuanian Defense Minister Juozas Olekas told the Ambassador that the GOL is still considering sending Special Operations Forces (SOF) to Afghanistan during their December 13 meeting. He also expressed interest in U.S. plans in Iraq, where Lithuania has troops, emphasized the importance of NATO's Baltic Air Policing Mission, and asked for support as Lithuania prepares to assume financial responsibility for its Provincial Reconstruction Team in Ghor, Afghanistan. He also discussed Lithuania's 2007 defense budget (ref A). End summary.

Lithuania still considering sending SOF to Afghanistan

12. (C) Olekas told the Ambassador that there is agreement "on the military side" to send Special Operations Forces (SOF) to Afghanistan but that "there are still political discussions" among the MFA and Presidency about when and where Lithuania could send its SOF. Olekas said that Lithuania is negotiating with the UK and Italy about contributing SOF to their areas of responsibility. Lithuania's contribution would have to end, he said, before its planned contribution of 50 SOF to NATO Response Force 10 (January to July, 2008). Responding to earlier reports that Lithuania was seeking a deal on Baltic Air Policing in exchange for deploying SOF to Afghanistan, Olekas denied that there was any such quid pro quo offered by his ministry. He did say, "When we discuss SOF, we also discuss air policing, as these are both things that affect the resources of the MOD." The Ambassador encouraged the Minister to deploy the SOF to Afghanistan in 2007 in order to respond to our common responsibilities in NATO.

Asking for Support for PRT Handover

13. (C) Olekas asked for U.S. support as Lithuania prepares to assume complete financial responsibility for the Ghor Province PRT, which the USG will support until the end of 12006. Although Olekas was not specific about what kind of support he wanted, we are aware that the Lithuanian military has asked CENTCOM if they can leave some U.S.-owned equipment behind. The Ambassador told Olekas that the U.S. wants to see Lithuania succeed with its PRT, and that we are ready and able to assist the Lithuanians with advice.

Air policing

¶4. (C) Olekas emphasized the importance of NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission as a visible symbol of Lithuania's NATO membership to the Lithuanian people. While he noted the importance of the mission in relation to aerial incursions from Russia and Belarus, he focused primarily on the its symbolic value. "We can go to a village and explain it to an old lady," he said, adding that it was the best example to show what Lithuania gets from its participation in NATO missions abroad. He reiterated Lithuania's plan to fill future air policing rotations before going forward with the Baltic States' formal request to extend the mission until 2018 (ref B).

Iraq

¶5. (C) Olekas asked about U.S. plans in Iraq, emphasizing that the USG's view was important to Lithuania, rather than that of the Iraq Study Group or other outside commentators. Olekas asked for "a little advance notice" if the USG is planning to go public with a new policy. He implied that Lithuania is trying to decide what to do with its troops in Iraq, noting its consideration of sending troops to Afghanistan and that the Ministry would have to go to parliament for a new mandate to keep troops in Iraq through ¶2008. (Comment: Parliament has overwhelmingly defeated several motions to withdraw the troops, so we don't see a political problem renewing their mandate under current circumstances. At the same time, a close advisor to the President recently raised the prospect of a Lithuanian troop pullout from Iraq with the Ambassador -- ostensibly to free up more troops for missions in Afghanistan-- so the possibility is clearly on the minds of GOL policymakers.)

Comment

¶6. (C) We believe that there is a strong possibility that Lithuania will send SOF to Afghanistan in 2007. We will continue to push the GOL not to use NATO as a horse-trading venue, but instead to pursue a common strategy to meet our common security needs.

¶7. (C) On Iraq, the GOL is watching the debate in Washington and London carefully. The Lithuanians will discuss future troop levels with the Danes and the British, with whom they serve in the south.

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